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WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

The Super-Secretive CIA Calls a Press Conference

By JACK BROOKS

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WASHINGTON—The super spies appear to have doffed their cloaks to keep their daggers sharp.

And other departments of the U.S. government don't like it.

The cloak came off Thursday when the Central Intelligence Agency called a press conference.

It was limited to 20 hand-picked American reporters. Reporters from other countries were not even told it was on.

NEW MOVE

But for the spooks in the Virginia spy palace to flirt so directly with publicity even in this limited fashion is something previously unheard of.

The state department, in particular, is upset that the CIA dealt directly with news media.

Previously, information gathered by the spy agency came to public notice through either state or the White House — if it came out at all.

Significantly, many of the statements at the press conference — broadly that the Russian economy is reeling — were contained in a speech in New York Thursday night by undersecretary of state George Ball.

The CIA also reported that Russia's gold reserves have slumped to less than \$2 billion and the Soviets don't want them to drop further.

There has already been scepticism on this point from London's financial circles. Opinion there was that it seemed highly unlikely the CIA could have picked up such accurate figures on such a closely-guarded Soviet secret.

The Ball speech was prepared after the CIA information had been seasoned and digested by the state department's own experts.

'NOTHING WRONG'

The state department feels the CIA is issuing diplomatically unseasoned findings that could possibly harm diplomatic moves about which the spies know nothing.

Why did the CIA do it?

Replied a spokesman (naturally unnamed): "Why not? Once in a while we come across something like this which need not be hidden and there's nothing wrong in publicizing it for attribution to us."

The last phrase, attribution to us, is the key.

The CIA has long complained

ed that while its failures have been publicized its successes have received no notice at all.

Because of its failures it has been accused of trying to make government policy in the foreign, military and trade fields.

TRUMAN KICKED

One of the latest critics is former president Harry Truman who founded the CIA in 1947 merely to collect intelligence and report directly to the president.

Last month, Truman said he was disturbed by the way the agency was diverting from its original assignment and becoming a policy-making arm.

More recently, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, professor of history, former intelligence man and possibly future vice-president to Lyndon Johnson, said:

"The CIA is making foreign policy and in doing so is usurping the roles of president and Congress."

EYE FUTURE

Both men accused the spies of making major and dangerous errors in these attempts at interference.

It could well be that the super-spies have now seen the writing on the wall and fear congressional investigations with a possible curb on their activities.

And to keep the dagger available and sharp they have lifted the cloak a few inches to show the world they succeed sometimes.